

Review: ‘An Act of God’ Is Back, With Sean Hayes

AN ACT OF GOD



Sean Hayes, center, as a human through whom God speaks in “An Act of God” at the Booth Theater. His angels (and fellow selfie subjects) are James Gleason, left, and David Josephsberg. Credit: Jim Cox

I know it’s traditionally said that the Jews are God’s chosen people. But evidence to the contrary is currently on view on Broadway, where “An Act of God” opened (or rather reopened) on Monday at the Booth Theater.

God’s chosen people actually appear to be — gay sitcom stars! Call it the big reveal left out of the Book of Revelation.

How else to explain the presence of Sean Hayes, the perky gay star of “Will & Grace,” taking over the role of the Almighty, which was initially played by Jim Parsons, the goofy gay star of “The Big Bang Theory,” when [David Javerbaum](#)’s priceless funny fusillade of irreverence first opened last season.

Technically speaking, Mr. Hayes is not portraying God. In his boundless mystery, God has chosen to come before us in the guise of Mr. Hayes. “For lo, I have endowed him with a winning, likable personality and know of a certainty that your apprehension of my depthless profundities will be aided by his offbeat charm,” as God-in-the-person-of-Mr.-Hayes says. God later adds, “He has no idea he’s here.”

The Almighty is not wrong about Mr. Hayes’s appeal. (How could an all-knowing being be wrong?) Just as Mr. Parsons made for an endearingly cuddly deity, so does Mr. Hayes. He almost looks like a grown-up cherub — albeit one who’s been on the Atkins Diet — and he channels the same fresh-faced boyishness and impish zest that made the character Jack a constant [scene-stealer](#) on “Will and Grace.”

For those who missed it the first time around, in “An Act of God,” first a series of tweets and later a book before coming to the stage, God has taken corporeal form — a holy being doing so for only the second time in Christian history (it appears to be working out better this time) — in order to correct mankind’s dire misconceptions about His thinking and His works.

A certain set of Mosaic laws, specifically, have begun to grate on His nerves, despite their undeniable popularity. “Yea, I have grown weary of the Ten Commandments, in exactly the same way that Don MacLean has grown weary of ‘American Pie,’” he says. And so he has come before us to expand the list. Or rather rewrite it, since some of the originals were too good to let go.

God is accompanied by two archangels: Gabriel, played with a funny air of poker-faced self-importance by James Gleason, who mans a Gutenberg Bible, reciting quotations at God’s command; and Michael, played by a feisty David Josefsberg, who takes questions from the audience and eventually, to God’s annoyance, begins challenging his ideas. Michael loses a wing for his impertinence.

But mostly it’s just God up there, chatting away like an amiable neighbor who has just settled down on your sofa for a good gossip. (The handsome set, by Scott Pask, suggests a celestial talk show, its centerpiece being a sweep of pristine white couch on which God mostly perches.) Aside from the inevitable jokes about “Hamilton” — one is tiring of those, but I’ll give God a pass — and that real estate mogul who has improbably become the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, “An Act of God,” once again smoothly directed by Joe Mantello, remains essentially the same show, a gut-busting-

funny riff on the never-ending folly of mankind's attempts to fathom God's wishes through the words of the Bible and use them to their own ends.

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Mr. Javerbaum's wit, one is tempted to say, is almost as infinite as God's wisdom. There's a good gag a minute, maybe more, in this 90-minute show. And in Mr. Hayes, God has a delightful infinite-wisdom delivery system. His God is by turns comically admonishing, affectionate and just occasionally petulant, as who would not be when his carefully laid plans have resulted in, well, the world in its endless imperfection.

"An Act of God," by contrast, could be fancifully viewed as one of God's better-realized creations. It's an hour and a half of comedy heaven, and I'd gladly watch it annually. What's Neil Patrick Harris doing next summer?
